

Approved 6/5/07

A Public Forum meeting of the Board of Selectmen was held on Tuesday, January 23, 2007 beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Walpole High School Auditorium. The following members were present.

Joseph Denneen, Chairman
Al DeNapoli, Vice Chairman
Chris Timson, Clerk
Catherine Winston
Michael Caron

Also present:
Michael Boynton, Town Administrator
School Committee Members
Department Heads

The Board of Selectmen had invited residents and Department heads to a meeting to discuss the projected school and municipal budget shortfalls.

Chairman Michael Ryan, School Committee, reviewed the school goals: Bring classroom sizes closer to guidelines, provide regular education supports to reduce SPED costs, Preserve the High School accreditation, reduce fees and establish an override reserve fund. The School Department needs \$900,000 to avoid layoffs and \$1.25 million for growth and restructuring. We plan to set aside an "Over-ride Reserve" funds in FY08 and FY09 and draw upon funds in FY10. The Schools lost 19 positions in the last budget. The insurance and benefits for employees falls under the municipal side.

The cost to homeowners for every 1 million dollars, is \$112 (for an average home of \$457,000).

The School Department has looked at doing business a different way. In Elementary schools there are 18 classrooms over guidelines, no staff in the media departments, no music for the fourth grade, and no assistant principals for elementary schools. In the Middle schools there are 52 classrooms above guidelines.

Discussed the High School with over 60 students where English is their second language. We would like to roll back bus transportation fees and parking fees. Mr. Ryan reviewed the critical unmet needs for Elementary, Middle School and the High School.

Mr. Boynton reviewed the municipal side budget outlook and financial projects for FY08. The total cost for FY08 Expenditures is \$943,554. Noted that the numbers are flexible on the Assessments and Benefits as he is still waiting for numbers. The Debt service is dropping, we are still waiting for the number from Tri County School. The Solid Waste is dropping through the efforts of Robin Chapell. The more we recycle the more that cost goes down.

He went on to discuss the discretionary increases and reviewed the General Government, public safety, School Department, Public Works, Health and Human services and Culture and Recreation. He noted that in 2003 the School Department received 66% of the budget and it is important to keep that ratio consistent so we have tried to maintain that level. Total increase is \$2,277,963.

Mr. Boynton reviewed the Fiscal year 2008 Revenue. He noted that the State aid number can change. If the state stays with the same program they used last year, that number should come through and maybe increase. Bayer construction permits will bring in \$900,000 for one time only.

There has been a slow down in the residential house markets. This is something that bears watching.

He reviewed the FY08 balance and there is a deficit of \$994,096. The Fiscal year 08 Expenditures. The General budgets \$61,517,151.00, Cherry Sheet offsets \$41,287.00,

Charter School Assessments to be raised \$337,779.00, School Choice Sending Tuition \$24,324.00, Minuteman tuition charge \$19,678.00, State and county Assessments \$676,341.00, other local expenses \$10,000 and overlay appropriation \$500,000.

The reduction impacts would be \$656,104 for schools and for \$337,993 Municipal. There would be no free cash or stabilization, if we have to implement that reduction. Mr. Boynton went on to discuss the municipal positions that have been cut over 15 positions. He discussed the FY 07 needs of the Municipal side in both expenses and salaries totaling \$278,754.

Mr. Boynton discussed the restoration impacts. If we had 30 people come in and they all took the family plan this is the cost.

The override projection number can change. The current total projection is \$4,737,471. Reviewed the numbers. The gap that the school has identified is \$174,747. The School department critical unmet needs is \$1,250,000, the Fee reductions are \$331,000, School Department future budget adjustments are \$150,000, Municipal needs combined for FY07 and FY04 are 591,628, Benefit impacts is at \$546,000 and Snow and ice deficiency is at \$200,000. We had to go to the reserve fund to pay for snow and ice budget over the past years. Prison mitigation elimination \$500,000.

Mr. Boynton reviewed the total estimated tax impact of override, prop 2 ½ tax increase and new growth at \$286 per \$1,000.000.00. He reviewed the tax levy explanation and the override question language. He noted that the reason the Town looks as good as it does is because of the excellent staff the Town has.

Mr. Denneen opened the floor up for residents to comment or ask questions.

Olga Hurley: Retired member of the Council on Aging, spoke of her concern about finances. She understands the dilemma, but is concerned. Her health insurance costs have gone up to \$500 for one month. Discussed the need to have the state help pay for special needs. If we do get that override, she felt the School Department needed to be more innovative. They need to try to save money somehow. Her heating bills have increased as well as electric bills. She hopes that the School Department will work to stay within their budget as she must.

Michael Ryan asked what they are doing for those that are on fixed incomes. He does not know how to defray costs to those on fixed incomes. Nancy Gallivan is working with the State and Federal legislators regarding increasing Chapter 70 funding. She is involved in looking to change the state chapter 70 funding formula without impacting the communities that need it. There needs to be a long term solution.

Mr. Boynton noted that the system is broken. The state has lost over \$880 million dollars in revenue. It is time to start changing the way we do business.

Cliff Snuffer reminded everyone that without the override the average tax bill will increase by \$175.00. This is a general override they are seeking and it will remain on the tax role forever. There is also going to be a request for a 16-20 million dollar public safety facility building. I would suggest to the Selectmen that the voters have been making up their minds for centuries and we can make up our minds on this. Both questions should be placed on the ballot on June 2, 2007. It is up to the Board of Selectmen to let us vote at the ballot box.

Mary Tolland, Teacher at Boyden School stated she has 23 youngsters in her classroom. Over the last few years the School Committee has made cuts in the budget but not in teachers. The School Committee is concerned that they can no longer protect the teachers. Whatever the decision is what we will live with in December. Just visit an elementary school on any given day and you will see that the requests are not pie in the sky. She asked the Selectmen to allow this override question be placed on the ballot for March.

Al Crosby has lived in the town his whole life. He is 78 years old and still working. He heard that the School Department wants there to be a special election. He has not heard any discussion on the public facility override. He feels that the School department wants to get a jump on this. The town is in a financial crises, how do we have the funds to spend on a special election. He does not feel the people of the town have the funds to pay for another override. There are a lot of people that do not have the money. The Town should live within their means. You are stressing people. He sees it everyday, familes in their 50-70 and they are moving out because they can not afford to stay here. Have to look at the smaller numbers. Every town vehicle leaves the Town Hall at night. They should be left in the yard. Where do you think these people are going to get this money. There are a lot of us that can still work, but a lot can not. He suggested a tax freeze for anyone 65 or older.

Mr. Caron agreed that the tax burden can be alarming when you get older and income levels drop.

Mr. Slate asked if the Town can afford an override. Walpole is #12 in the tax bills we pay. Just had a general override in 2001. We have had 7 overrides in the last 10 years. Something is going wrong in the way we are running this town. The tax increases that we are looking for is not temporary. It is forever and ever. Does not understand the class size goals. Does not think we can afford 27 more teachers. My taxes keep raising and I can not life within my income.

Bob Cavicchi from Riverwalk Way noted that in the past four years there have been an additional 66 students. The School Committee has submitted a comprehensive plan. What do we want for Walpole. One of reasons they came to Walpole was because of their school system and he would like to maintain that for his grandchildren. He does not like to pay anymore taxes than anyone else. He is a senior citizen living on retirement. He asked the Board to please put the question on the ballot.

Woman from Broad Street stated she is an advocate for the schools. She wanted to know what the town pays for health care for their employees.

Mr. Boynton explained that the health care is a fixed cost. The health insurance costs go up 14% and more. We are looking at wellness activities. We are trying better at keeping our employees health. Prescriptions have increased. We are jumping on with the State giving the employee an opportunity to take on a lower rate plan. It does not go away. The overall increase is beyond the control of the town.

Rob Anderson, Precinct 7 knows that the Board has a difficult decision before them. He had called the Board of Assessors today and they told him there have been 5 overrides since 1983.

Mr. Fucile explained that there has not been an override since 2001. Since 1988 there were 23 overrides and 17 of them were unsuccessful.

Tom Dirscill Old Farm Road urged everyone to go back to 2001 and compare to 2006. The Department of Labor is showing your CPIU was 13.82%. The cost of our own government has gone up above the index. He feels there is no reason why the government should be looking for more money. We all have to live within our means.

Patricia, Emerson Road felt it is a question of quality of schools for the children. She asked the Board to place the question on the ballot.

James Taylor noted that everyone has a budget in town. There is nothing for the seniors in Town.

Robert O'Leary did not think that the month of March was a good time for an election. He also noted that there is a difference between a mandate and guideline. The guidelines are Walpole's thinking.

William Bachel of Cobb Terrace was a special ed student and he feels the program is very important. He calls the State House all the time.

Mrs. Cross has two children at Fisher School and she feels that everyone agrees that schools are very important. She wanted to know what other alternative there was besides the override. She suggested maybe selling Adams Farm.

Criss, Jorie Lane has two children in the system. Noted that the Town is losing a lot of money in State aid. She suggested bringing the class sizes to state guidelines.

Ms. Winston stated that she has spent many hours going over this issue. We have a recurring problem that can not be fixed with an override. You have residents who are being taxed over their means. They decide to sell their homes, they move into a smaller home. When they sell their house someone with children may purchase it and they use the services that a senior does not. This situation can not be corrected. She reviewed the last 7 years of the budget. In 2001 schools saw an increase of \$600,000, 2001-2002 1.8 million, 2002-2003 1 million, 2003-2004 \$300,000, 2004-2005 2 million, 2005-2006 1.8 million and 2006-2007 \$600,000. That is a total of 8.1 million dollars in 7 years.

Mr. Caron stated that the Board will be discussing this issue again next week. The schools have made this town strong. He does not like high taxes, but he will fight for schools.

Chris Timson stated that he does not take the vote lightly. He questioned how do we get out of the cycle we are in. We are working on this. We are working on a combined Police and Fire facility obtaining entry for our Town employees into the state health care network, trying to work with commercial development. We are looking at the Goldies property. Board sent a letter to Congressman Lynch expressing our concern about obtaining federal funding for certain special education costs.

Al DeNapoli thanked everyone for attending. A lot of interesting comments have been made. We have been working on this. We are working with the state house. Our revenue can not keep up with the cost of services. He wants to hear solutions. He hopes to put this on the ballot so the public can address it.

MOTION moved by Mr. Caron to adjourn at 10:20 p.m. seconded by Mr. Timson,
VOTED 5-0-0

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Timson, Clerk